

Duxbury Tercentenary Committee,
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Duxbury's Hero, Captain Myles Standish

When the Duxbury Tercentenary is celebrated on July 3rd, 4th and 5th, the ceremonies will include ^{em}commorative exercises on Captain's Hill, on which stands the monument of Myles Standish, the cornerstone of which was laid in 1872. The captain has long been the first citizen of Duxbury, and with good reason.

Many Americans know the doughty captain only through having read Longfellow's "The Courtship of Myles Standish." The Duxbury Tercentenary Committee recently prepared an outline of his career which is substantially as follows:

Duxbury was settled about 1630 by Captain Myles Standish, William Brewster and John Alden, who were attracted by its nearness to Plymouth and the ~~commanding view from Captain's~~ ^{the latter} ~~Hill.~~ ^{beauty of its soil as compared to that of}

"In the year 1632," according to historical records, "a number of the brethern inhabiting on the other side of the bay at a place called Duxborough, growing weary of attending the worship of God at such a distance, asked and were granted a dismissal, and soon after being embodied into a church they procured the Reverend Ralph Partridge, a gracious man of great abilities, to be their pastor."

The name of Duxbury has been spelled in several ways. It is thought that it originated from Duxbury Hall, one of the English names of the Standish family. The Indians called it Mattakeeset.

Myles Standish, who had so much to do with the shaping of these early days in Duxbury, was born in Lancashire, England, in 1584. His family which is still extant (in Boston today is a business man bearing the same name), went back to the time of the Conquest. Of Myles's early life comparatively little is known. He was, however, a lieutenant in the English forces fighting against the Spanish in the Netherlands, and it was during the truce between these warring factions that he became a Plymouth Pilgrim.

According to one of the records of these days, (quote) "he joined the Pilgrims at Leyden with his wife Rose, not long before the sailing of the Speedwell, and was with the early settlers in Plymouth after the landing, till he removed to Duxbury, which may have been

before 1630. The first settlers lived in Duxbury only in the summer time, going to Plymouth for the winter; and Captain Standish is mentioned in 1632 as one of those who promised to live in the town in the winter that they may the better repair to the worship of God." (unquote). So he settled in Duxbury, in the southeastern part of which stands a hill known as Captain's Hill.

Standish has been described as a man who (quote) "had an active genius, a sanguine temper and a strong constitution; also as one who chose to suffer affliction with the people of God; who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, and turned to ¹fight the armies of the aliens." (unquote). In his encounters with the Indians he generally got what he wanted. In 1623 he was sent by the Governor with orders to break up a plot by the Indians who, it was learned, intended to destroy the settlement of near-by Wessagusset (now Weymouth). Here is one account of this particular incident: (quote)

"On this expedition, the most celebrated one of his life, and which is possibly a fair criterion of his character, he chose but eight men, refusing any more. On arriving at the settlement he found the people scattered, and wholly unconscious of their impending danger. Having quickly assembled them, he informed them of their situation, now, however, without exciting the suspicions of the Indians. Soon after, an Indian bringing the Captain some furs, he treated him smoothly; yet the Indian reported that he saw by the Captain's eyes that he was angry in his heart." (unquote)

At another time, Pecksuot, a courageous Indian warrior, said to Hobomok, Standish's guide and interpreter and an inmate of his household, that he understood that the captain had come to kill him and the rest of the Indians there, but tell him (said he) we know it, but fear him not; neither will we shun him. Let him begin when he dares; he shall not take us unawares. A little later, standing before Standish and sharpening his knife, he said: "Though you are a great captain, yet you are but a little man; and though I be no sachem, yet I am a man of great strength and courage!

The next day Pecksuot, Wittowamat and his brother, a lad of eighteen and another Indian were in a room together with Standish and about the same number of his men. The captain flashed a signal, the door was immediately closed and barred. Seizing Pecksuot,

Standish snatched the knife from his belt, while his men fell upon the others. A short struggle ensue^{ed}, which ended in the death of Pecksuot by Standish, and that of the other Indians, except the youth, whom they afterwards hanged. Hobomok, who stood by, a silent spectator of all that passed, then smilingly exclaimed: "Yesterday, Pecksuot bragged of his own strength and stature, and told you that though you were a great captain, yet you were a little man; but today I see you are big enough to lay him on the ground."

Yet in the eyes of Robinson, then pastor of the church, Standish was far from being a hero. He wrote to the church in Plymouth quote "to consider the disposition of their captain, who was of a warm temper. He hoped that the Lord had sent him among them for good, ~~if they used him right~~, but he doubted whether there was not wanting that tenderness of the life of man, made after God's image, which was meet, ^{11/10/1629} and he thought ~~it would have been happy if they had converted some before they had killed any.~~" (unquote)

On the other hand, Standish had struck a strategic blow and by determined action in a time of doubt dispelled the fears of his followers and put terror into the hearts of the ~~enemy~~ enemy. As one biographer puts it: (quote) "His action needs no apology. He acted but the part of a brave defender of his country, who feels that upon his own vigorous exertions the defense of the people depends." (unquote)

Standish died in 1656 at the age of seventy-two and was buried in Duxbury. The monument erected to his memory on Captain's Hill was designed by Alden Frink, the architect, and is unique. It is 116 feet high, with a fourteen foot statue of Standish on its top. The monument is constructed of rough granite, the entrance arch being built of stones given by the New England states which bear their names. The keystone was presented by General Grant.

According to the outline of Captain Myles's career prepared by the Duxbury Tercentenary Committee the wooing of Priscilla Mullins by John Alden was substantially as set down in the poem. As to the effect upon the friendship of the two men the Tercentenary sketch of Myles Standish states that though Captain Standish soon married another woman, it is said that to the day of his death he never forgave Alden for the outcome of the Priscilla Mullins commission. This lasting jealousy, however, ^{The sketch adds} would seem to have been mere talk, for Standish and Alden were long associated in governmental affairs; moreover their children intermarried.

Next week we will present another story of early Duxbury prepared by the Tercentenary Committee.